

Dave Mastin

State Representative
16th District

Session Agenda

1998

Franklin/Walla Walla/Columbia/Garfield/Asotin counties

Committees:

- Energy & Utilities
— *vice chairman*
- Agriculture & Ecology
- Appropriations

Olympia office:

404 Legislative Bldg.
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7836

District office:

13½ E. Main #211
Walla Walla, WA 99362
(509) 527-4111

Holding the line

Winter 1998

Dear neighbors,

Working families live within their means. Their government should do the same. When the Legislature meets this year, you can be sure of two things: We will hold the line on spending, and we will not raise taxes. Thanks to a healthy economy, our state has a budget surplus of \$861 million. Already, debates in Olympia revolve around the best way to use this surplus money. Options include maintaining the surplus in a rainy day account in case of an economic downturn, and using some of the surplus to pay for needed transportation improvements. This is only one of several key issues we will consider in the upcoming session. This newsletter explains what you can expect from me and from your state government in the coming months. Please take a moment to read it, and share your thoughts with me by phone, letter, e-mail or even a personal visit. Remember, I represent you. To do my job right, I need your advice and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Dave Mastin

TOP ISSUES for 1998

Education

Transportation

Budget

Crime

Toll-free legislative hotline: 1-800-562-6000

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State Representative



Saving Salmon

Washington citizens face the very likely prospect of federal endangered species classifications for several state fish runs in the next year. Already, upper Columbia River steelhead have been listed as endangered, and Snake River steelhead are listed as threatened. The consequences of these and future decisions cannot be overestimated; the spotted owl controversy shows us how truly difficult and emotional endangered species issues can be.

We can be sure of one thing: Unless we act quickly, the federal government will take control of our streams and rivers, and we will have no voice in decisions that affect the lives of people throughout Washington. We must do everything we can to prevent that. In California and Oregon, federal endangered species restrictions have created significant hardships for citizens.

Ultimately, our goal in Washington is the restoration of wild salmon runs. As we embark on this effort, we must search for the most effective solutions to our problems. We don't need a one-size-fits-all strategy. We have to find ideas that work.

I have spent the last several months serving as co-chair of a legislative task force on salmon restoration. We have conducted a number of hearings and work sessions, and we intend to develop an effective plan to save salmon in Washington.

One of our goals must be to avoid further federal endangered species listings. We can do this by showing the federal government the amount of work that is already being done to save salmon. We can start by working smart — find the programs that work and give them the assistance they need. We also have to improve coordination between federal, local and state government agencies, in order to make the most of our efforts.

The job will not be easy, but I hope we can talk about positive results by the end of the legislative session.



Transportation – the economic engine

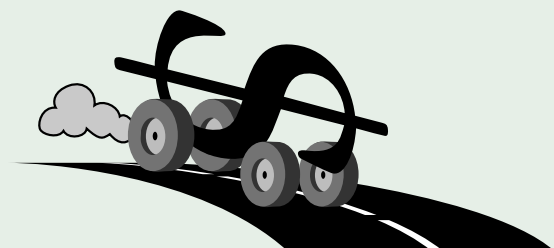
Our state economy depends on a reliable transportation system. Communities throughout Washington need well-maintained roads and occasional improvements to accommodate growth and increased traffic.

This is a primary responsibility of government. However, our ability to pay for transportation projects has declined steadily for several years, in part because our chief funding source, the state gas tax, is a flat rate (23 cents per gallon) that does not increase with inflation.

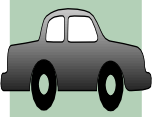
To compensate, we have proposed a plan that will provide \$2.4 billion to improve roads over the next six years. We will use a greater share of current revenues from car license fees to pay for transportation projects. At the same time, we would provide a cut of up to \$40 in current car license fees.

That is a very simplified explanation of our proposal, which you can expect to see on the ballot this fall. We want to take care of the problems in our transportation system, but we want to maintain our commitment to other important priorities as well. We will ask voters if they are willing to strengthen Initiative 601 and allow us to shift existing revenue to transportation projects without harming other essential services, such as education.

Voter approval is crucial to our plan. If we do not receive it, a gas tax increase becomes more likely.



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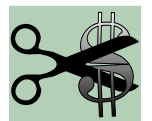


Expensive tabs

Citizens who complain about excessive license tab fees have a point. These fees — known as the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax — are among the highest in the nation. The average working family pays property taxes, sales taxes, gas taxes and an assortment of other fees to the state. After paying so much, it is understandable that citizens become frustrated with paying yet another fee just to drive a car to work and back.

A portion of the MVET revenue — roughly 24 percent — goes to the state general fund, and pays for expenses unrelated to transportation. That is likely to change this year. People reasonably assume that a tax on vehicles should pay for transportation expenses, especially when we have so many projects that require attention.

This year, you can expect a reduction in overall MVET rates and a shift of MVET revenues from the general fund to transportation. Maintenance and improvement of our roads and highways is one of the primary duties of state government, and we need to be flexible enough to adjust our priorities when the need demands it.



Fiscal restraint

You can expect us to hold the line on state spending this year. Our budget is about \$150 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit, and we want to keep it that way. Since Republicans took control of the House of Representatives in 1995, we have seen a sharp decrease in spending growth, along with an upturn in the state economy.

These twin trends have led to one of the largest budget surpluses in recent memory: \$861 million. Many people wonder what the state will do with this “extra” money. Of course, there are those who can find any number of creative ways to spend it all. However, the general consensus is that we will set aside a large portion of the surplus — more than \$500 million — for a “rainy day,” meaning an economic downturn. As I explained earlier, some of the remaining money may be used for transportation improvements.



Education

When children can't read, they can't learn. That's why our priority in education continues to be improving the literacy of our K-12 students and encouraging parental involvement. Recent test scores among fourth-grade students show that less than half of them met the standards of reading ability for their age.

In the Legislature, we have been making reading education a top priority for the past several years. Key legislative leaders have been making a real crusade out of correcting the problems in the way reading is now taught, and bringing effective, research-based techniques back into each and every classroom.



Rep. Mastin confers with Rep. Gary Chandler, R-Moses Lake, during debate on the House floor.



A record to remember

We don't pass bills and forget about them. Results count, and after we set policy, we make sure it translates to results. Part of our job this year is to implement the major policy reforms we passed in 1997. Thanks to Republican leadership, we have a strong record to build on for 1998. Here's what we'll be monitoring this year:

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW POLICY

What to watch

Juvenile justice reform

- Tougher sentencing standards
- Sentencing alternatives, including boot camps
- Mandatory parental involvement in juvenile court cases
- Juvenile justice grants for local communities
- Juvenile records not sealed automatically

Budget

- Holding the line on spending
- Protecting I-601 limits

Welfare reform

- Time limits on benefits (five years over one's lifetime)
- Requirements to work, search for work or perform community service
- Child-care, housing, medical and food assistance for working parents
- Job training
- Teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits

Property taxes

- Temporary 4.7 percent cut in state rate becomes permanent in 1998 (Referendum 47)
- Local governments must vote publicly before raising property taxes above inflation rate

